

From Traditional to Client-Based Nonprofit Management Course Design: Reflections on a Recent Course Conversion

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the literature on the role of client-based community service-learning courses in Masters of Public Administration programs. It focuses on how to design client-based service-learning courses that benefit students and community partners without placing undue burdens on faculty. After providing a synopsis of common challenges and associated solutions identified in recent literature, we describe key elements of a recent course conversion and share our reflections on its implementation. We focus on course design because learning outcomes are affected by both the design and management of community service-learning courses. By discussing course design in more detail, we aim to help faculty assess whether they have the resources to successfully implement client-based service-learning courses. The article concludes with reflections on the effectiveness of the innovations we implemented, a checklist of considerations for designing similar courses, and considerations for adapting our model to other settings.

Keywords: client-based courses, community service learning, course design, nonprofit management

In recent years, public administration programs have been working to increase the experiential and service-learning aspects of their curricula to enhance student learning outcomes while strengthening relationships between universities and the communities in which they are located. Part of a broader resurgence of attention on community-engaged scholarship, these service-learning opportunities are seen as one way for public administration programs to ensure that the work of public

administration scholarship, teaching, and learning stays relevant to the practice of public and nonprofit administration. Nonprofit management courses are seen to be a good fit for service-learning courses because local nonprofits are natural partners and the course content lends itself to applied projects (D'Agostino, 2008; Waldner & Hunter, 2008). Service learning has been defined as “a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222). It is one approach to problem-based learning that confronts students with real-world problems and is deemed an effective approach for helping to bridge the gaps between theory and practice while exposing students to public service experiences (e.g., Bryer, 2011; Bushouse et al., 2011; Imperial, Perry, & Katula, 2008; Koliba, 2007).

Although the literature touts the potential of service-learning courses and documents success stories for student learning and community partner outcomes, it also describes several challenges confronted by faculty who have implemented service-learning courses. Challenges include the constraints imposed by semester-based timelines, busy student and faculty schedules, community organizations with limited capacities, constraints imposed by universities without the infrastructures or rewards systems to promote faculty involvement in community-engaged work, and difficulties with meeting the dual goals of enhancing learning outcomes while adding value to community organizations in a short timeframe. Although the challenges and some associated solutions have been well documented in the literature, few design and implementation guides are available for faculty interested in replicating success stories and minimizing challenges. Thus, faculty members who teach service-learning courses struggle to create an experience that achieves desired outcomes in a way that is meaningful for all participants—the students, the university, and the community groups involved.

Given that learning outcomes are affected by both the design and management of community service-learning courses, focusing on design as well as outcomes merits attention. Written in the tradition of the “scholarship of engagement” (McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2009), this article takes on that task, describing and reflecting on a process of course design and implementation that took place over a two-year period. It contributes to conversations about how to design service-learning courses and projects that simultaneously benefit students and community partners without overburdening faculty by providing a detailed summary of and reflections on our experiences. By discussing course design in more detail, we aim to help curious but cautious faculty assess whether they have the resources and wherewithal to successfully implement client-based service-learning courses.

The article begins with a synopsis of common challenges faced in the design and implementation of community service-learning (CSL) courses, particularly those geared toward nontraditional Master of Public Administration (MPA) students who attend part-time, primarily in the evening, and are currently employed in a related field. The challenges surfaced from a literature review related to the design and implementation of CSL courses. The article goes on to report on the development and design of the San Francisco Community-Based Organization (CBO) Support Project, an innovative client-based CSL experience explicitly created to address the challenges identified in the literature. After documenting the process of designing and implementing the CBO Support Project, the article goes on to reflect on the effectiveness of the innovations and provides a checklist others may use in designing similar courses. The article concludes with a discussion of considerations for adapting the model to other settings.

COMMON CHALLENGES AND ASSOCIATED SOLUTIONS

The planning and design of the CBO Support Project was rooted in a review of the literature that focused on designing and implementing CSL courses, especially those geared toward nontraditional students. Motivated by that literature review, we strove to maintain a balance in trying to achieve the goals of enhancing student-learning outcomes and adding value to community organizations while minimizing the burden for the instructor. Our reading of the literature suggested that designing a CSL course to achieve those goals would require rethinking traditional CSL course models for two reasons.

First, traditional service-learning courses that place students in direct service roles at organizations do not always serve the needs of nontraditional MPA students, who often have several years of direct service experience and, in many cases, are employed full-time in direct service roles during the day while attending classes in the evenings. Even students not currently employed in direct service roles are generally employed full-time and cannot spend a substantial number of hours on-site with a community partner during traditional working hours (Bushouse, 2005; Waldner & Hunter, 2008). Second, traditional service-learning courses have been criticized for treating community partners as service sites or the community as a laboratory, serving primarily the educational needs of students and goals of faculty while stretching already scarce organizational management resources too thin. That can cause some community groups to be skeptical about CSL courses (Gazley, Littlepage, & Bennett, 2012).

As a first step toward rethinking traditional CSL models, we looked more closely at the literature on client-based service-learning courses. Distinct from traditional service-learning courses, client-based courses position a student as an external resource—much like a consultant—whose role it is to produce (or co-produce) a final report on a predefined, clearly bound project for the “client” or community partner (Waldner & Hunter, 2008). Client-based courses allow

skilled graduate students to demonstrate their acquisition of management skills and related knowledge by applying it to real-world situations while helping community organizations achieve goals they otherwise would not be able to achieve, at least not in such a compressed timeframe (Bushouse, 2005). In addition, rather than seeing community partners primarily as service sites where students learn, client-based approaches explicitly recognize the important role community partners play in offering learning experiences for students. Community organizations can benefit from student work in more ways than just gleaning the labor and expertise, by gaining important and valuable outside perspectives that can facilitate organizational learning (Gazley et al., 2012; Worrall, 2007).

In short, the design of client-based courses helps address concerns nontraditional MPA students and community partners often have with traditional CSL courses. Still, effective implementation of client-based courses raises three overlapping challenges: one related to managing expectations of community partners, a second related to identifying client projects and matching them with student project teams, and a third related to student learning and performance outcomes.

In an effort to gain insights about strategies used to address these challenges, we focused on recent literature that addresses CSL course design issues. The literature revealed that effective CSL course management, whether traditional or client based, takes a precious commodity—faculty time (Bushouse et al., 2011; Imperial et al., 2008). Specific examples of the additional time it takes to successfully implement service-learning courses include time needed to monitor projects and provide frequent, timely, and authentic feedback to student work in progress; time in and out of the classroom to allow for interactive reflective time with students; and time needed to identify suitable service-learning projects and partners (Tai-Seale, 2001). The literature emphasizes that setting realistic expectations regarding the time commitments for students, instructors, and community partners and ensuring that students and clients have adequate time to meet (which can be particularly challenging for working students) can help set the stage for a smooth semester. Thus, we were mindful that any design or implementation innovations we identified also would have to minimize the time burden for all parties.

Strategies for managing expectations of community partners focus on the importance of creating clear lines of communications to facilitate their understanding of the time and resource demands associated with the course. For example, Bushouse (2005) found that by requiring community partners to respond to a request for proposals in order to participate in the CSL course was useful in helping CBOs identify scope of project and estimate staff time needed to support it. She also noted that providing CBOs with a clear voice in the service-learning project may help CBO staff feel like true partners and ensure that the project timelines are reasonable and the projected deliverables relevant to their work.

Two concerns related to student-learning and performance outcomes are ensuring that (a) the type and level of work are appropriate for MPA students and (b) deliverables produced by students are valuable for clients and are of high

quality without requiring faculty or community partners to spend excessive time on supervision and feedback. These two concerns are closely related to identifying projects and matching them to student teams. All of these concerns have to be addressed in the context of student-learning outcomes for the course. Most service-learning projects do not provide an opportunity for students to incorporate all of the course materials and instead require students to delve more deeply into one area of knowledge than others. At the same time, some skills needed for successful client-based projects, like managing group dynamics, may not even be included as standard course content (Lambright & Lu, 2009). Solutions identified in the literature include establishing a clear theoretical framework to guide the course and projects, integrating course readings and lectures with project topics, and encouraging reflective practices for students (Bryer, 2011; Koliba, 2004; Lambright & Lu, 2009; Waldner & Hunter, 2008). For example, instructors have built in a range of activities intended to have students reflect on the connections between the reading and their service-learning projects, including journaling, organizing class discussion around a particular theory or concept and its relevance to student projects, and incorporating reflective assignments and activities frequently throughout the semester (Koliba, 2004; Lambright & Lu, 2009; Waldner & Hunter, 2008). Creating opportunities for students to share their final projects with one another and their community partners is seen as worthwhile (Bryer, 2011; Waldner & Hunter, 2008).

Matching community partners with student groups and helping groups manage their own dynamics can be challenging, especially where student capacities and work quality are uneven (Lambright & Lu, 2009; Waldner & Hunter, 2008). Some students may not perform at their highest level, either because they are not fully motivated, which could be because the course is required or there is a mismatch between student interest and agency work, especially when faculty match students to projects without much input from the students (Gazley et al., 2012). Although this is not unique to service learning, in client-based courses, the clients bear the brunt of the impact, in the form of final products that are not of high quality and consequently of little use in their work (Waldner & Hunter, 2008).

One way to address the challenge of ensuring the quality of deliverables to the community partners and minimize risk to partners is for students to receive feedback on their work from faculty before finalizing it for the community partner. Although this may be of great benefit to the client, if not carefully managed, faculty may end up dedicating an unrealistic amount of time to providing students with detailed guidance and even helping them finalize the project (Tai-Seale, 2001). Some studies suggest that courses that allow students a certain degree of autonomy in their relationships with their community partners and in determining the scope of the final project may enhance learning outcomes (Lambright & Lu, 2009), but that autonomy may need to be balanced with a clearly defined scope of work and ongoing communications with the community partners so that the end product is, in effect, co-produced (Bushouse, 2005).

THE CBO SUPPORT PROJECT

The CBO Support Project was designed to address the challenges and build on successful practices identified in the literature related to managing expectations of community partners, identifying projects and matching them to project teams, and student learning and performance outcomes. The student learning outcomes included:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of a range of nonprofit management concepts and their application;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of nonprofit management challenges and strategies for addressing and mitigating the impacts of those challenges;
3. Show familiarity with scholarly and practice-centered nonprofit management resources;
4. Exhibit ability to synthesize resources and use them in cases and real-life scenarios; and
5. Exhibit ability to work effectively as a member of a team and in partnership with a CBO.

The overarching goal for the course redesign was to create a formalized mechanism connecting MPA students and CBOs through structured semester-length community service-learning projects that simultaneously served the mission and community engagement objectives of the MPA program and the learning outcomes of the nonprofit management course. That formalized mechanism would take the form of a user-friendly Web-based outreach and data management system.

We used a \$4,500 grant from the university's Institute for Civic and Community Engagement (ICCE) to minimize the faculty time needed to convert the traditional nonprofit management class into a service-learning course. This process was time-intensive and occurred over the period of one year, with three months spent on research, six months dedicated to course design and content development, and another three months for outreach and selection of community partners. The grant allowed a portion of the funds to be earmarked for the services of a curriculum consultant (a former student) and another portion to be paid to an experienced consultant to develop the website using Drupal, a free and open-source content management system, with our guidance and content. After the grant funds were spent and the curriculum design complete, the MPA program agreed to supplement the stipend funding so the curriculum consultant could provide ongoing support the first semester the newly designed course was offered.

In keeping with Bryer's (2011) recommendation to provide a clear framework for the course and based on our shared understanding about what was important to include in nonprofit management coursework that could also benefit CBO managers, we decided that a client-based model rooted in an evaluation and organizational learning framework would be best suited to our program. We

thought it important to contrast top-down perspectives of evaluation, frequently seen as a means to secure funding and demonstrate success based on program output data, with bottom-up perspectives that use evaluation outcomes as a mechanism to facilitate organizational learning (Carman, 2007; Hoole & Patterson, 2008; Poole, Nelson, Carnahan, Chepenik, & Tubiak, 2002). Evaluation and organizational learning go hand in hand, reinforcing the needs for planning, identifying outcomes and success indicators, and reflecting on process and outcomes to learn and make program modifications when needed.

Table 1.
Logic Model Components for Course Redesign

Problem Statement	The MPA program lacks a formalized mechanism to connect MPA faculty, students, and community-based organizations through client-based CSL projects in a way that minimizes challenges for CBO partners, students, and faculty. The lack of a formal mechanism limits opportunities for all parties to benefit from those projects.
Goal	To create a formal mechanism to connect MPA students and CBOs in structured semester-length community-service learning projects that serve the mission and community engagement objectives of the MPA program and the learning outcomes of its nonprofit administration course.
Rationale	Client-based CSL projects have the potential to contribute to variety of positive outcomes (e.g., increasing knowledge and resources for community partners, increasing professional experience of students, building partnerships between the MPA program and the community).
Resources	\$4,500 grant; faculty member and curriculum consultant; scholarly and best practices research
Activities	Conduct scholarly and best practices research; identify student learning outcomes; design course activities and assignments, timeline, and expectations about project deliverables; develop mechanism for recruitment, screening, and selection of community partners.
Outputs	Timeline and activities for students, faculty, and CBO partners, website and database, resource guide, and evaluation plan.
Outcomes	Minimize challenges of CSL project for all parties; support achievement of student learning outcomes; enhance capacity of individuals and organizations in nonprofit sector; increase capacity for organizational learning; strengthen and expand partnerships.

The framework also provided a useful organizing scheme for the class because it could be applied to a diverse array of CBOs—diverse in their size, their capacity, and their missions—as well as to several important topics in nonprofit manage-

ment such as leadership, resource development, or strategic planning. During class discussions we were able to explore the implications of some of that diversity for the type of work the organizations did, their level of sophistication in carrying out that work, and the likelihood that they would be able to implement the recommendations the student teams made in their final reports. The course confronted students with real dilemmas faced by organizations currently operating in San Francisco, with each CBO presenting a unique set of management challenges.

We developed a logic model to inform the redesign of the nonprofit management course to illustrate the problem the CBO Support Project was meant to address, the outcomes it intended to achieve, and the resources and activities it would employ to achieve those outcomes (see Table 1).

We shared that logic model with students at the beginning of the semester, which was the first time many students had been exposed to a logic model, as a way to introduce the tool before having them develop a logic model of their own for a program with which they were familiar. That framework guided the course and projects, not only for students, but also for community partners.

Managing Expectations of Community Partners

To mitigate some of the challenges identified in the literature related to managing expectations of community partners, including the amount of time they would need to commit to the project, we developed a website (<http://sfcbosupportproject.org/>) that helped manage the process of client recruitment and selection for the course. The website served as a central repository for all information related to the community partners' involvement in the course—from the application to the agreement to participate to a detailed timeline for the semester. Having that information centralized in one virtual space eased time management burdens and facilitated communications throughout the semester. The website was also used as a tool to address issues identified in the literature about service-learning courses that so often focus exclusively on the student experience with little concern for the community partners. We highlighted benefits for the CBO partners and staff, including professional development from exposure to new resources and ideas, learning how to develop and use logic models in program planning and evaluation, improving their abilities to strengthen their programs, and building partnerships with our students and faculty.

The detailed timeline of activities for the semester was a tool we used to help clearly articulate the time commitments required by community partners as well as to communicate our dedication to ensuring that the projects would be completed by the end of the semester. To qualify as a partner, a CBO nominated one of its mission-serving programs, defined as a program (or grouping of activities) with a substantive focus rather than a general administrative or development function of the organization, via the online form available on the website. To help ensure that community partners took seriously the need to dedicate some of their time to these projects, the online application process was fairly involved.

The first step for the CBO was to fill out an online organizational profile, which asked for basic information about the size of the organization and scope of its work. A staff person who would serve as the primary liaison for the class could then nominate up to three projects for the course. The CBO staff liaison had to directly oversee or manage the nominated program, receive approval from his or her supervisor to participate, and participate in and attend the required class sessions identified on the timeline. Having those dates identified well in advanced helped the CBO partners reserve that time.

Once selected, each CBO partner had to sign an agreement consenting to participate in the required activities and to adhere to firm deadlines, in and out of the classroom. Outside of the classroom, activities were centered on identifying and helping refine the project's scope of work and communicating with student teams as needed. We made it clear to the CBO partners that the deadlines were firm due to the constraints of the semester timeline. The CBO partners were required to attend two classes—one that was run as a logic model workshop and another that was a planning session with the student teams assigned to them. The logic model workshop was run as a participatory training session, where the instructor used information the CBO partners had provided in advance as examples in the workshop and where the CBO partners were invited to discuss their programs. Students participated in the workshop alongside the CBO partners, giving them a chance to preview one another before student teams were assigned to CBOs.

The second class session CBO partners were required to attend was held just after student teams were assigned to work with specific CBOs. The class time served as their first formal introduction and was used to negotiate and refine the scope of work for the project the students would carry out, based on information the CBOs provided in advance. These required class sessions also helped us reinforce the logic model framework for the class with the CBO partners. The CBO partners were also invited (though not required) to attend the class where students presented their final reports. Mindful of their time constraints, we provided each CBO partner with a 30-minute window in which their team would present the final report so they could choose to attend only part of that final session.

Identifying Projects and Matching Project Teams

We developed the project selection and matching process as a way to balance competing concerns documented in the literature: the need to streamline the project identification process as well as the value of giving both community partners and student teams a voice and autonomy in identifying projects. Our eight CBO partners were each asked to nominate up to three projects; then students reviewed those projects and provided us with a rank order of their preferences (they were required to give at least three options but could rank them all if they wished). Each student was asked to write a short paragraph explaining his or her rationale for choosing his or her first choice. Students were also granted the right to refuse to work on any one project or with any one CBO without providing a reason.

This option was designed to respect the diversity and privacy of students while accommodating difference among students and CBOs (e.g., a student not feeling comfortable working with a faith-based organization or with an organization whose mission he or she did not support). We also recognized that other issues or conflicts of interest may arise—if a student worked for an organization that funded a CBO partner, for example. To make the matches, we considered the feasibility of completing the project during one semester given student abilities, interests, preferences, and team sizes. With one exception, student teams were all pairs, which limited the amount of work they could reasonably accomplish during one semester.

The student teams in consultation with their CBO partners directly handled the process of negotiating the final scope of work and project deliverables (see Appendix). The negotiations started during the class where student teams were formally introduced to community partners and the teams presented the logic models for the proposed projects to the community partners. We provided advice and feedback when necessary, mostly related to clearly articulating specific project goals and narrowing the scope of work to ensure it was manageable in the context of the class. Some of that feedback included assuaging student fears of not identifying a project big or complex enough to satisfy the course requirements. Student teams developed a problem statement based on the client-identified issues; sometimes this process was straightforward but in other instances the students had to do more probing and consult with us. For example, upon further discussion, two of the student teams were able to identify underlying problems contributing to the client-identified issues; those underlying issues needed to be addressed before taking on the exact issues identified by the CBO partners. Specific project goals and deliverables were determined jointly and only after the project problem statement was mutually agreed upon. The project deliverables were designed so that the CBO partners could use the tools and implement the recommendations with relative ease, so that final reports would be less likely to sit idly in a file somewhere.

Student Learning and Performance Outcomes

To integrate the logic model and organizational learning framework throughout the class, students were assigned weekly readings that addressed the role of evaluation in organizational learning, including creating a culture of evaluation. Each week's lecture and classroom discussion aimed to bring together that reading with the topic of the day (e.g., strategic planning, personnel management). In addition, students were given three logic model assignments over the course of the semester. The first one each student prepared on his or her own, about a program with which he or she was familiar. The purpose of that exercise was to ensure that students were familiar with building logic models and to convince them that the detailed work was worth the effort. The second logic model assignment was the first graded team project, due about halfway through the

semester, at the class where student teams were formally introduced to their community partners. The purpose of this assignment was to help students narrow the focus of the scope of work for the project they would ultimately do for the CBO partner. The CBO partner provided the information for that logic model in advance, including the premise behind its problem statement. During class, student teams presented the logic model to their community partners and negotiated the scope of work and project deliverables with the CBO partner at that time. We purposefully included CBO partners in these activities so that they could participate in refining the scope of work and learn about the approach the students would be taking to complete their projects. In addition, having CBO partners attend the class session facilitated the initial contact, minimizing the time they and student teams needed to coordinate schedules. Students were also required to include the project logic model in their final reports. In addition, we assigned three reflection papers: one due early in the semester, one in the middle, and a longer one toward the end. These assignments asked students to reflect on the connections between the reading assignments, classroom activities, and their projects.

Mindful of the literature that pointed out that some of the skills and knowledge students need to effectively manage client-based projects are not typical components of a traditional course, we did three things to include some of them. First, we created a resource guide that provided students with an array of best practices and scholarly resources they could use for their projects; the resource guide matched resources to each of the project types in order to help direct students as they narrowed the project's scope of work. We dedicated a portion of one class session to training them in how to use that resource guide and how to go about accessing materials and strategies for identifying more project-specific resources. Several of those resources were available for students to borrow from the instructor's informal nonprofit management library. Second, to ensure that they were using the guide and resources in it, we required each team to write an assessment of eight of the resources (which included books, journal articles, websites, and classroom activities) identified in that guide. Third, we dedicated a portion of the class where they were introduced to their CBO partners to discussing strategies for project management and communications.

Another set of challenges related to student performance is rooted in uneven student capacities, which make it difficult to identify free ridership, assess whether everyone is grasping the full range of material, and accurately assign grades. We did two things to mitigate this concern and to assess whether students were grasping a full range of the material covered in class. One measure of individual performance was the grade each student received on the final exam that covered the essential topics from the semester. In an effort to ensure there was not too much free ridership going on we structured the grading so that there was an even balance between team assignments and individual assignments, with each counting for 50% of a student's final grade.

REFLECTIONS ON INNOVATIONS AND THEIR APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

This section shares our reflections on the effectiveness of the innovations related to managing expectations of community partners, identifying projects and matching project teams, and student learning and performance outcomes. Our reflections include ideas for modifications when the innovations did not work as well as we had intended. Rooted in these reflections, we provide a checklist of issues and corresponding questions that others may consider when designing a similar course. That checklist also includes examples of our answers to those questions. We conclude with considerations for adapting this model to other settings.

Effectiveness of the Innovations

Organizing the class around the logic model framework proved extremely useful for two reasons: it served as the central principle around which to organize the course and helped ensure it remained coherent and reinforced the value of using logic models as tools for communications, planning, and evaluation. Getting both students and CBO partners to think together about the logic of how the activities and deliverables aligned with the problem statement and the intended goals of the project helped ensure learning was shared by students and community partners. This approach also allowed students to gain valuable skills in joint problem identification and gave them an opportunity to practice communications and negotiations skills about issues of great importance to CBO leaders.

Building in the process of negotiating the final scope of work based on the client's stated goals and student assessments was important and valuable. Three of the CBOs we worked with had fairly substantial internal issues that had to be addressed before students could do their work—and in two instances resulted in different project goals than the CBOs had originally identified. For example, one CBO wanted its student team to focus on program evaluation and funding issues, but after students met with staff and board members, it became clear that the program was not being implemented. Moreover, there were multiple visions about what the program ought to be and how it would be implemented. The students diagnosed founder's syndrome as an underlying issue and realized the first step they needed to take was to help the organization articulate a coherent shared vision of the program. This example points to an important value that this client-based service-learning model brings to the CBOs: Students bring valuable external perspectives and can facilitate difficult conversations, much as a paid consultant might do.

Sometimes the matching process worked very well. For example, the organization whose program focused on leadership and diversity training and had high levels of organizational capacity was matched with a student team whose members were genuinely enthused about working on the project because of the subject matter. The youth development organization had relatively low levels of organizational capacity but was assigned a team that included one high-capacity

in-service student (she worked at a nonprofit capacity-building organization) and one in-service student with much less experience. The less experienced student told us that she was particularly grateful to have been paired with the more experienced one. Importantly, according to informal feedback provided by several of the CBO partners, the information provided in the final reports was immediately relevant to their work.

However, the process of negotiation was not always smooth, either because of team dynamics or capacity constraints on the part of the CBO. In fact, one project faced these challenges simultaneously. One student faced personal issues that resulted in a breakdown of communications between her and her teammate. At the same time, the CBO partner was not always able to provide information to the student team in a timely manner. By the time we discovered the seriousness of these issues, the semester was coming to a close. They managed to salvage the project and deliver a good and professional final report in the end, but that took a good deal of extra work for one of the teammates. In future semesters we will build in more formal mechanisms for explicitly assessing these dynamics at early and midpoints of the semester so we can better advise students on how to address them. We are currently piloting the use of a peer assessment rubric for teamwork that might prove useful. We also plan to ask CBO Partners to evaluate student work, a process we currently use for internships and applied field experience credits.

Even though we worked to integrate the logic model and organizational learning framework throughout the course, we missed some opportunities to engage in class discussion and reflection around a few of the topics that seemed more distant to some of the students. One reason is that we made some assumptions about students' abilities to make those connections—or voice their apparent absence—through reading and class discussion. While that worked well for some students, others viewed their projects very narrowly. Some were already nonprofit professionals, often at early stages of their careers, but with a clear point of reference and set of experiences to relate to various topics. Others had very little or only indirect experience in the nonprofit sector and could not immediately see the relationships among various concepts and their projects. Part of the challenge with this course in particular was that it had traditionally been taught as a fundamental class that surveyed a range of essential concepts and theories to ensure students were exposed to an array of nonprofit management topics. We are making two modifications to improve the integration of the academic with the applied work in future semesters. First, we are taking advantage of a curriculum redesign so that this course will focus on organizational learning and nonprofit management while another course will focus on fundamental perspectives in nonprofit management. Second, we will build in additional in-class reflection assignments and require teams to lead discussion about a particular concept or theory and how it relates to their project.

Checklist for Designing and Implementing Client-Based Courses

In an effort to share the lessons we learned so that other faculty may benefit and apply or adapt the steps we undertook to their own courses, we created the checklist of issues and corresponding questions that others may consider when designing a similar course. That checklist also includes examples of our answers to those questions (see Table 2). The list of issues and corresponding issues presented is not exhaustive but provides useful illustrations of those we deemed most

Table 2.
Checklist for Success

Issues Affecting Success	Essential Questions to Consider	Our Responses
Pre-Design Research and Considerations		
Institutional environment. An institutional environment that favors community engagement will likely facilitate successful implementation.	Is the course part of curriculum in a university, college, and/or department whose mission is compatible with goals of service learning and community engagement?	Is community engagement an explicit focus of the school in which PA program is situated (School of Public Affairs and Civic Engagement)?
Constraints on faculty time and other resources needed to design CSL courses can impede their successful implementation.	How much faculty time and other resources are needed for course design?	Research conducted over 3 months; design and content development completed in 6 months; partner outreach and selection took 3 months. Needed funding to support this work.
	Is funding or other sources of institutional support available to faculty who undertake course redesign?	Received \$4,500 grant from ICCE; additional funding from PA program available. Funding used to pay stipends to curriculum consultant and Web developer, as well as to purchase non-profit management resource books for student use.
Need to ensure course design is manageable and content is relevant for students and community partners.	What are the current training needs for nonprofit managers and how can CSL courses best be designed to fulfill those needs for students and CBO partners?	Reviewed existing literature to identify training needs of nonprofit managers; benefits and challenges of CSL courses and projects; best practices for design and implementation of CSL courses.
	Under which conditions will students in this program be interested, willing, and able to participate in a CSL course?	Held an informal feedback session with students to discuss program-specific, student-identified obstacles/concerns about CSL courses.
	At what level of analysis should the applied work focus (e.g., whole organization or program)?	Took a program level focus because it (a) seemed more manageable for small groups in a 15-week course; (b) seemed more likely to result in valuable results for CBO; and (c) lent itself to reinforcing the evaluation framework.
	What will be the organizing framework for the course and applied projects?	Identified an evaluation and organizational learning framework.

Table 2.
Checklist for Success (continued)

Issues Affecting Success	Essential Questions to Consider	Our Responses
Course Design and Student Learning		
Need to match course content with CSL projects and keep workload manageable within semester constraints.	How will the instructor ensure that students are absorbing academic content not directly related to their CSL projects?	Incorporated several written reflections into the course, but realized students would benefit from more time reflecting in class.
	What additional resources will students need in order to successfully complete their CSL projects?	Identified several open-source online resources for ease of access. Also used \$500 of grant funds to establish a small library for nonprofit management with books available only to students enrolled in class.
Need to identify effective process for identifying projects and matching them to student teams.	What mechanisms can we institute in order to facilitate the CBO partner and project selection processes?	Created a Web-based application process for CBOs that provided step-by-step instructions, including minimum capacity requirements for the CBO.
	What mechanisms can we institute to give both CBOs and student teams some voice and autonomy in finalizing project goals?	Allowed CBOs to nominate up to three projects for consideration. Students reviewed and ranked their preferred projects.
Need for expectations management and establishing credibility with partners and students.	How can we minimize scheduling burdens for student teams and CBO partners?	CBO partners required to attend two class sessions. Student teams frequently given time to meet in class.
Need to document whether and why CSL courses are effective at achieving which outcomes	How can we assess the experiences students and CBO partners had in the course?	Created opportunities for students and CBOs to evaluate their experiences in the course/projects, in addition to university-required course evaluations. These included a post-class survey for CBO partners and students; student assessments of activities/resources; and final student reflections on projects.
Outreach and Communications with Community Partners		
Need for expectations management and establishing credibility with partners and students.	How can we identify and recruit potential community partners?	Developed electronic and print outreach materials and distributed them through various networks with which we were affiliated.
	How can we clearly communicate the time commitment CBO partners need to make?	Developed timeline that clearly articulated time commitment required on part of CBO partners and made it available on the website before CBOs applied. Required CBO to sign Partner Participation Agreement.
	How can we ensure that CBO partners have the capacity to participate in the projects?	Required CBO to demonstrate commitment of upper management and/or board of directors through nominations process. Required CBO to sign Partner Participation Agreement.

relevant. We hope that the checklist, along with the synopsis of the literature and description of the processes we undertook in designing and implementing our course, will serve as useful time-saving resources for faculty who are beginning to think about designing client-based courses for nontraditional students.

Client-based coursework seems to have an important and valuable place in MPA curricula, which suggests that it is a worthwhile use of faculty members' time and effort to convert existing courses or design new ones to include alongside more traditional class formats. That said, we caution faculty who take on this work to be mindful of how much institutional support they will need to design and implement the course so that it adequately meets the dual goals of achieving student learning outcomes and adding value to the community partners (the clients). Because a portion of the grant funds could be used to pay a stipend to a curriculum design consultant, the faculty member was effectively able to "buy time" to think about course design, which provided the impetus to redesign it. The relationship with the curriculum consultant worked well and made sense in part because she was an alumna and had an existing relationship with the faculty member. That element added value because it provided a valuable learning experience for the alumna and contributed to furthering program goals to enhance the capacities of individuals working in the nonprofit sector. Now that the course has been designed and offered, we expect that it will take less time to refine and sustain, so that in the future the course will be taught by one faculty member, using the framework and web platform we created.

Considerations for Adapting the Model to Other Settings

Although we implemented this class in a nonprofit-rich urban environment, we see no reason why it could not be adapted to other settings. Although some of the specific decisions related to course design and content may be unique to classes where small nonprofits are the clients, the model could be adapted for courses that involve public sector clients, especially local government entities. We found that focusing on the program level was a central organizing principle that meshed well with the evaluation and organizational learning framework; that program level focus is likely more important than whether the clients are private or public, small or large. The size of the community partners and their programs ought to be considered in light of the expected number of students and clients for the course. Conceivably, a high-capacity community partner could have two or more student teams working on different program-level projects at the same time. The instructor must work to ensure that the match between projects and project teams is made thoughtfully to ensure projects are manageable in the context of the semester and that teams are the appropriate size to carry out the project.

Similarly, the model could be adapted to more sparsely populated areas by taking advantage of technology to facilitate interactions among community

partners and students (using Skype or synchronous online learning environments, for example). The existing Web-based platform could still be used as an outreach, screening, and application tool. It would be difficult, however, to see how community partners without access to a reliable Internet connection and comfort with a range of rather fundamental computer applications could be adequately incorporated into such a course.

One added value of the client-based format that would likely translate to different settings is the experience students gained in three sets of professional skills that may not be given much attention in a traditional course format: the art of providing thoughtful constructive criticism (through the resource and activities assessment as well as in discussion throughout the semester), the practice of engaging in critical self-reflection, and the opportunity to learn firsthand the benefits and challenges of serving as an external consultant. Students also gained experience working in teams and engaging in joint problem-solving, crucial skills in the current environment. In many cases team members learned a great deal from one another—sometimes that learning was about a particular subject but other times that it was related to factors like time management or communications. These are skills of professional practice that would benefit students in a wide range of MPA programs, regardless of the characteristics of the clients they serve.

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APPENDIX

Project Examples

Example from Class				
General Project Examples Provided During Application Process	CBO Program's Issue Focus	Client-Identified Issues	Project Goals	Project Deliverables
Inquire about your program's current performance measurement methods and learn how to maximize and/or build upon the information your program already collects about activities and participants. Inquire about perceptions of program goals, proven successes, and areas for further inquiry through surveys/interviews with one or more of the following stakeholder groups: program staff, volunteers, organizational leadership (e.g. board members, executive director), and community partners.	Transitional housing Youth development	Organization does not understand why follow-up program participants are falling short of benchmarks. Organization would like to assess stakeholder perceptions regarding partnerships and develop a process to foster sustainable collaborations. CBO does not have the capacity to reflect upon and address collaboration needs.	Improve understanding of the gaps/weaknesses that are impeding the follow-up program success. Create recommendations to rectify those gaps/weaknesses. Gather information about stakeholder perceptions in order to further clarify and strengthen collaborations and partnerships.	Outline of best practices literature Case manager survey Qualitative and quantitative survey findings Action plan for next steps Three stakeholder-specific survey instruments Results of piloted surveys with specific recommendations Tools to develop a partnership framework Draft memorandum of understanding for use with partner organizations Annotated bibliography of collaboration literature
Learn more about how your program fits into the network of resources currently available to community members in San Francisco through a review of community assets, opportunities, and programs and/or input from community stakeholders.	Community improvement and capacity building	CBO capacity to revise existing needs assessment survey instruments is limited. CBO needs updated instrument to identify capacity issues and service gaps for partner organizations and to set priorities for program offerings.	Update needs assessment/landscape analysis survey to include questions about resources and resource sharing. Gather information about best practices in the field of CBO capacity building	Updated needs assessment/landscape survey ready to implement with partner organizations Inventory of best practices in the field of CBO capacity building organizations